

NEWS RELEASE

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Christian County Man Pleads Guilty to Methamphetamine Manufacturing and Distribution Conspiracies

Springfield, Illinois -- Rodger A. Heaton, United States Attorney for the Central District of Illinois, announced that a Christian County, Illinois man, Eldon E. "Butch" Shelton, age 37, entered a plea of guilty today to conspiring to manufacture methamphetamine and conspiring to distribute methamphetamine before United States District Court Judge Jeanne E. Scott. A sentencing hearing has been scheduled for May 19, 2006.

The plea is the result of negotiations with the United States Attorney's Office. Under the agreement with the U.S. Attorney's Office, Shelton and the government agreed to jointly recommend a sentence of imprisonment of 270 months or 22 years 6 months to Judge Scott. At the sentencing hearing, Judge Scott may accept the sentencing recommendations of the parties or reject the parties' recommendation and impose a sentence the court believes appropriate. Shelton faces a minimum sentence of 20 years and up to life in prison upon conviction.

During the Court hearing and as part of his plea agreement, Shelton admitted that from September 3, 2003, to at least January 14, 2004, he and others conspired to manufacture and distribute approximately 2.5 kilograms of methamphetamine in Taylorville, Illinois. Shelton admitted that he was a leader or organizer of the conspiracy and that he and others, at his direction, secured pseudoephedrine cold pills, anhydrous ammonia, lithium batteries and other chemicals and equipment which he and others used to manufacture methamphetamine. Shelton also admitted that he distributed methamphetamine that he and his co-conspirators manufactured to other people in the Taylorville area.

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Shelton was indicted by a federal grand jury on January 6, 2005 and has been in the custody of the United States Marshals Service since his arrest on January 25, 2005. Also charged in the indictment with Shelton are Gavin M. Walker, Michael Smothers, David Bradley Chamness and Jeffrey L. Durbin. Michael Smothers entered a plea of guilty to the charge and is scheduled to be sentenced on March 31, 2006. David Bradley Chamness and Jeffrey L. Durbin, also have entered guilty pleas and are scheduled to be sentenced on February 3, 2006 and March 10, 2006, respectively. Walker's case is scheduled for a jury trial before Judge Scott on March 6, 2006.

The case is the result of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDEFT) investigation which included agents from the following federal, state and local law enforcement agencies: Drug Enforcement Administration, Illinois State Police, the Central Illinois Enforcement Group, Illinois Attorney General's Office, Christian County Sheriff's Office, Taylorville Police Department and Pana Police Department. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Esteban F. Sanchez and Assistant Attorney General Delores Hurley who has been designated as a Special Assistant United States Attorney.

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